

OLAVIDE MUSEUM

## Tinea Favosa

Sculptor: Enrique Zofío. Clínica del Dr. Olavide. (Olavide Museum Figure No. 219. Hospital de San Juan de Dios. Bed 3.)



## Clinical History

The patient was P. B., a native of Pedrosa in the province of Zaragoza, 16 years of age, of lymphatic temperament and weak constitution. He reported that at the age of 5, while playing with other boys of more or less the same age, he mistakenly put on the cap of a boy infected with ringworm instead of his own cap. He was unaware of the mistake and noticed nothing wrong with his head until some time later, though he was unable to say exactly how much, when he noticed dandruff and scabs on his head that itched, much more so in damp weather. Thus it was that, troubled by these symptoms for 11 years, during which time he was given home remedies (lard, purgatives, etc), he came to Madrid and was admitted to the clinic upon arrival on June 20, 1889.

**Present condition.** The entire area extending from the superciliary arches to the temporal, parietal, and occipital regions almost as far as the axis was covered with scabs more than 1 cm thick, yellowish-white in color, with 20 or 30 patches of hair distributed over the surface of the scalp. In some areas the scabs were dry, while in others they were covered with serous fluid that was clear in some places and a little bloody in others. They were painless and did not affect other bodily functions with the exception of the nervous system. In the patient's own words, when he began to sweat he became confused, and this interfered with the agricultural work someone of his age was expected to perform.

**Treatment.** Emollient poultice applied 3 times a day until the scabs fell off; fresh lard; thymol ointment applied to the head.

Removal of hair with tweezers as needed, and washing of scalp with soapy water.

The patient has spent 3 months at the clinic. His hair is growing back thicker, with few bald spots, which leads us to believe that he will be completely cured.

## Comment

The clinical history is noteworthy for its high level of detail in the description of the patient's cutaneous lesions, and for the way it shows how common tinea favosa was at the time in rural areas, which were generally economically depressed.

Since at that time specific medication was nonexistent, treatment was topical and based on depilation and the use of bactericidal or antifungal products, one of which was thymol, a colorless substance with a characteristic odor that is present in the essential oils of thyme and oregano. Its antibacterial properties were known to the Egyptians, who used thyme, and thus thymol, to preserve mummies with terpene. Chemically, thymol is a terpene (2-isopropyl-5-methyl-phenol) discovered in 1719 by C. Neuman and synthesized by M. Lallemand in 1842. It is still used frequently in veterinary medicine and in apiculture as a 5% dilution in ethanol.

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